



NEWS



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AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM WARREN BARTLEY, III

AND WERNER ERHARD

(Werner Erhard and William Bartley were interviewed for us shortly before Professor Bartley's biography, WERNER ERHARD: The Transformation of a Man, the Founding of est was published.)

QUESTION: How did Werner Erhard and William Warren Bartley meet?

WILLIAM WARREN BARTLEY: I originally met Werner at my session of the est standard training in April 1972, but we didn't really start having personal conversations until about a year and a half later. I invited Werner to come over to the University (California State University, where Bartley is a professor of Philosophy) to give a talk to some philosophy club students who were interested in hearing him.

WERNER ERHARD: There is an interesting anecdote that goes with that: I went to Bill's office a few minutes before he arrived. I sat down in Bill's chair at his desk and I realized, this was it. Once you become a philosophy professor you have absolutely made it -- because your job is to read, study and ponder great questions of life. It was really a remarkable experience for me. It just never occurred to me how great it was that people could investigate philosophical issues directly. I was used to having to work it out in the circumstances of life.

BARTLEY: Werner, there is a sort of flip side to that story I don't think I've ever told you. One of the first perceptions I had of you when I took the training and when I watched you in various seminars was "here is someone who's actually doing philosophy -- actually teaching people philosophy and getting it across to them in a way in which the academic community could never do." I was studying and searching and delving into the same issues, but I wasn't really getting those issues through to people.

QUESTION: Is that what made you decide -- after having written previous works like the biography of Ludwig Wittengenstein, Lewis Carroll's Symbolic Logic, and Morality and Religion -- to write a book about Werner?

BARTLEY: All those books I wrote were part of my own personal quest; I was trying to find things out, and these books just happened to be

vehicles which I used to help me do that. This book is that way, too. In the years following the est training I have been fascinated by the issues Werner is raising and that are raised in the est training. This book was an opportunity for me to find out how this philosophy arose and was applied in one individual's -- Werner's -- life.

QUESTION: Bill, what was your purpose in writing this book?

BARTLEY: First, it was simply to tell a fantastic story. Second, I saw this as a potentially very important work, a work that could move people, that could enlighten people with regard to their own families and their own relationships. I also saw it as a vehicle in terms of which some of the important abstractions of est could be conveyed -- and conveyed in terms of an individual life story which is more immediate than the "academic" book that I had first envisioned writing.

Next, it was a new art form for me. That excited me. These were all wrapped up together in a way in which no one could really predict.

QUESTION: Bill, you seem to have covered many contemporary psychological and consciousness disciplines in the brief chapters in the book entitled "Intersections". You've made it clear that est is not an amalgam of these disciplines, so why have you included such a broad survey in a book which is basically a biography?

BARTLEY: The first reason, of course, is that Werner did touch base with these various movements or disciplines that I've talked about in the book and it's part of communicating the issues that he raised, and what he went through.

There's another reason, too. One of the things I'd like to do with the book is to bridge the several cultures that we have in this country. I don't think the kind of culture which knows what the issues are in est, Mind Dynamics, Transcendental Meditation and Zen is appreciated in those parts of the country which have something to do with the so-called "high culture" -- the university, the publishing world, areas like that. I wanted to communicate some of the ideas involved in these movements and disciplines and some of the places where they connect with this so-called "high culture", so that there would be some educational value in this project in addition to the mere narration of a life story.

ERHARD: Bill has actually done a better job, a more insightful job, of explaining some of those disciplines than some of the disciplines have been able to do themselves. I'm sure that he's been of service to all of us in that respect.

BARTLEY: There's another point that might be worth mentioning. These disciplines come out of a kind of oral tradition where little importance is put on talking about them. This is one of the first times a professional philosopher has made any serious attempt to write about these disciplines, report the main things that they have to say, and integrate them with other issues and traditions.

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QUESTION: Bill, you're a philosopher, how would you describe -- the short version -- the philosophy of est?

BARTLEY: I don't think there is any short version. The book is itself the short version and just begins to scratch the surface of what the est philosophy is all about. est involves the major parts of philosophy. It involves an epistemology which is a way of looking at how we know. It involves ontology -- an understanding of the nature of man and the world. It involves ethics, which is particularly focused on issues of integrity and responsibility. Part of the aim of est is to help make issues which are a part of a man's life (whether he knows it or not) conscious and explicit so that he can become freer and more responsible in his deployment of his own philosophical presuppositions, in every facet of his life.

QUESTION: In line with the way you've written it, Werner's life story seems to have an everyman quality. Was this mythic quality intentional or something you discovered?

BARTLEY: It wasn't intentional, it wasn't something added to the story, it was there on the surface, something that didn't have to be discovered. Unless you get that mythic quality to it, I don't really think you get the story in its fullness. You have to see that this is a story that offers hope and insight. It's a story that has a real transforming power. This is a story that people read and say, "Oh, I want to send this to my mother," or "I want to send it to my daughter or brother because....," and then you get a story of why it's relevant to that particular person.

This is a book that tells the story of a search for true identity. A search for Self. It's also a story about a man who is an imposter, which makes it more ironic and more appropriate that it should be about the search for true identity. It's a story which is relevant to every man because every man is in a sense an imposter just as Werner is an imposter, just as you are an imposter, just as I am an imposter. All of us have these fake acts we sometimes identify with in our worst moments. All of us have the power to transcend that, to transform the quality of our lives. That's really what the book is about.

QUESTION: Is this an authorized version?

ERHARD: Bill had the full cooperation of everybody involved in the story including myself. I, of course, could not guarantee my family's cooperation but I could certainly support their cooperation. As far as I know everyone with whom Bill interacted was willing to be completely open and unreserved.

BARTLEY: No, this isn't an "authorized" version, neither is it a censored version. In other words, Werner didn't tell me what to leave out or what to put in. He didn't tell me to red pencil some things. There was nothing of that at all. Initially, that was one of my fears. You know, "After all", I said "this is a living person, these are living people that I'm dealing with and they're bound to want to leave some of it out." I didn't have any experience of that whatsoever. There was no attempt to censor. Everyone wanted to have the whole story told and have the truth come out.

ERHARD: You should also know that I don't agree with Bill's interpretation of everything in the book. He uses systems of understanding which I have some trouble with. By the same token, I never argued those things with Bill because I saw their value to people. I don't mean I didn't discuss them with Bill but I never argued that they were a wrong way of interpreting my life. At any rate, Bill wrote the book as an objective and independent effort. Obviously, there are things about it which are idiosyncratic to Bill. I don't agree with some of the interpretations which Bill makes. While I see them as legitimate, given the systems he uses, I disagree with some of the systems.